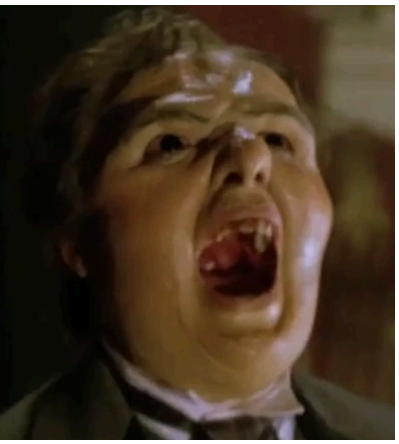
Thrup'ny Upright

Meditations on Jack the Ripper



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“No doubt Jack the Ripper excused himself on the grounds that it was human nature”

- A. A. Milne

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Front: Edina Ronay and Barbara Windsor as a comedic Annie Chapman in **A STUDY IN TERROR**. Sidebar top: Christopher Plummer and James Mason in **MURDER BY DECREE**. Sidebar middle: Ivor Novello is **THE LODGER**. Sidebar bottom: Armand Assante in ITV’s JACK THE RIPPER. Above: Netley and Sir William Gull in *From Hell*. Back: Belgian **HANDS OF THE RIPPER** poster.

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~Ripping Yarns~

You Don't Know Jack

Jack the Ripper suspect Walter Sickert's 1907 oil on canvas Mornington Crescent Nude*, which hangs in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Since the Whitechapel murders of 1888, the few facts have been put aside for the sake of sensationalism and stupidity; in 2001, for example, novelist Patricia Cornwell destroyed some of Sickert's art in her quest to unveil the Ripper's identity.*

JACK the Ripper will forever cast his (or her) shadow. Countless films and television programmes have exploited a mythology rooted in one of the first examples of tabloid journalism. Plot devices are often conjured out of thin air for dramatic gain, though the firm facts are so slim that any form of adaptation will shroud it in thick, London fog.

"Serial or sex murder, like fetishism, is a perversion of male intelligence. It is a criminal abstraction, masculine in its deranged egotism and orderliness"
- Camille Paglia

The prosperous West End newspapers quickly turned the murders into fiction from the onset, creating a Victorian melodrama under the guide of what would be termed "new journalism" then the "tabloid style." It was a mix of social and moral concerns, together with friction between the press, the police and a shifting and expanding population. After the death of Annie Chapman - the second Ripper victim - papers referenced The Marquis de Sade and a decedent aristocrat; this completely unfounded yet headline-grabbing connection created a killer that led a double life: a West End gentleman by day, sadistic killer by night. In 1888, there were also increasing concerns about the East End music halls, notorious establishments which basically acted as fronts for brothels and praying grounds for West End "gentlemen."

But if The Ripper wasn't Gentlemen Jack, he was Doctor Jack. This was also instigated by Chapman, because the inquest stated the murderer "*might* have been an expert with a knife." Doctor Jack was further underpinned by gothic fantasies of surgeons, and their apparent sexual frisson with playing God.

1888 Whitechapel was densely populated with significant immigrant communities. Overcrowding, poverty and poor sanitation were rampant, leading to high rates of disease and crime. Ultimately, Jack the Ripper is *who we want to be*; the Victorian establishment latched on to this alien encroachment, refusing to believe such murders could be committed by anyone British. Approaching a hundred years later, we were still applying the same over-simplification, where conspiracies, secret societies and mistrust of government reached fever-pitch in the 1970s. Even today, we still look to higher society as our enemy of choice, with a mixture of fascination and resentment.

The legacy of Sir William Gull, one of the Psysicians-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria, is the greatest insult in the Ripper fantasy world. Gull made significant contributions to medical science, including advancing the understanding of myxoedema, Bright's disease, paraplegia and anorexia nervosa (for which he first established the name). Furthermore, Gull was 71 years old and in ill health when the murders were committed.

Thus the misconception that the killer was a Royal surgeon who wore a top hat and cape, and carried a black bag of surgical instruments, was firmly in place before the madness really set in. The Sir William Gull/Coachman Netley/Royal Conspiracy has its origins in a 1970 article in *The Criminologist*, before gaining momentum in a 1973 BBC pseudo documentary (which directly inspired Stephen Knight's best-selling *The Final Solution)*. Despite chief protagonist Gull being a physician and never practised as a surgeon - or being a Freemason - the threads of this theory were nevertheless woven into a 1988 television serial starring Michael Caine, and the Alan Moore/Eddie Campbell graphic novel *From Hell*. In reality, the only description of the murderer said the Ripper had "the appearance of a sailor," and actual evidence is limited to the demise of five women within one square mile of Whitechapel between 31st August and the 9th November 1888.

Some of the more amusing suspects have included Charles Lutwidge Dodgson - the real name of author Lewis Carroll - and Lord Randolph Churchill - the father of Sir Winston. Carroll was thought to have had an unhealthy fixation with virginal purity, though it is unclear why this would have made him a suspect, and Churchill seems to be mentioned only because his political career was cut short by a fatal bout of neurosyphilis. American crime writer Patricia Cornwell "staked her reputation" by naming British artist and Ripper suspect Walter Sickert as Jack. The novelist bought thirty-one of Sickert's works, and claimed that some of his canvases' contain visual references to the crimes; according to Cornwall, Sickert was turned into a killer by a defective penis. Cornwell also claimed a letter written by the killer had the same watermark as some of Sickert's writing paper. There were hundreds of letters from different people falsely claiming to be the murderer, and the watermark in question was on a brand of stationery that was widely available at the time. So much for Cornwell using the title *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper - Case Closed* for her 2002 book.

American quack doctor Francis Tumblety is a suspect involved with an additional interwoven mystery. Since the publication of *Dracula* in June 1897, there have been suggestions that the book's protagonist is more closely associated with Jack the Ripper than a Transylvanian count. Neil R. Storey's *The Dracula Secrets: Jack the Ripper and the Darkest Sources of Bram Stoker* (2012) undertakes an in-depth investigation of the sources used by Stoker, painting an evocative portrait of the author and his friends and the London he frequented in the late nineteenth century. It argues that through "a secret code" found in "previously unpublished letters," Stoker wove details of Tumblety into his novel. This code was apparently inspired by Stoker's lifetime literary friend Sir Thomas Henry Hall Caine - to whom he dedicated *Dracula* - who had an arduous connection with "the doctor" when recruited to edit Tumblety's biography.

Further blurring fantasy and reality, German-born English actor-manager Richard Mansfield was accused of being Jack because of his mesmerising portrayal in the London production of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. At the height of the Ripper panic, one frightened theatre-goer wrote to the police calling-out Mansfield because he could not believe that any actor could make such a convincing stage transformation from a gentleman into a killer without being a homicidal maniac.

But what if the mystery was just a moral panic and Jack did not exist at all? If the evocative name had not been attached to the Whitechapel murders - spawned by an overzealous reporter - could the crimes be one of many phantom slashers? Two particular examples further resonate with class war. The Mohawks were a gang who supposedly terrorised London in 1712; one of their vices was rumoured to put fish hooks in people's cheeks and drag them along with fishing line. The culprits were said to be rich young men who would drink to excess before heading out to cause havoc. As recorded in *Chambers Book of Days*, only one group of aristocrats were ever put on trial, and the defendants themselves claimed to be vigilantes scouring the streets in search of the *real* Mohawks.

Spring-heeled Jack was Victorian England's proto-Spiderman, with a Devilish slant.

When Spring-heeled Jack appeared in 1838, it was on a more supernatural level. This dark, iron-clawed, fire-breathing entity would attack during the night, before leaping or bouncing over walls and rooftops with the aid of his vaulting boots. Was Jack the Marquess of Waterford, an aristocrat with a reputation of cruelty and practical jokes? The identification of the rich would tie into contempt for ordinary people, and the fact that there were no convictions would subscribe to privileged power. Or, perhaps, it is merely imagination.

Original or existing suspects tend to be the focus of new revolutionary books. *The Diary of Jack the Ripper* (1993) revealed that the killer kept a record of his mutilations. The writer is James Maybrick, a drug-taking, womanising, 49-year-old Liverpool cotton merchant with a history of domestic violence. And Sir John Williams - obstetrician to Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Beatrice - was at the centre of John Morris' *Jack the Ripper: The Hand of a Woman* (2012), where the author claims Williams was driven to insanity after not being able to have children, and transferred the crimes to his wife Lizzie.

The Diary of Jack the Ripper *was not the only item tying James Maybrick to the crimes. A second piece of evidence was a Victorian pocket watch discovered not long after the journal. The watch purportedly belonged to Maybrick, with the back casing inscribed with the message "I am Jack, J. Maybrick" along with the initials of each of the "Canonical Five" victims.*

But rest assured Ripper tour guide/researcher Russell Edwards at last solved the crime - albeit with a longest-standing suspect - with his *Naming Jack the Ripper: New Crime Scene Evidence, A Stunning Forensic Breakthrough, The Killer Revealed* (2014). Russell also orchestrated the false discovery of a skull segment from 12-year-old Keith Bennett on Saddleworth Moor in 2022, who was murdered in 1964 by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. Edwards' statements are emphatic: "he is no longer just a suspect. We can hold him, finally, to account for his terrible deeds. My search is over: Aaron Kosminski is Jack the Ripper."

Kosminski was a Polish barber who suffered from schizophrenia, and Edwards had amazingly acquired the shawl of Catherine Eddowes, the fourth Ripper victim, at an auction in 2007. According to the sleuth, the shawl had two significant DNA samples, blood that was traced to a descendent of Eddows, and semen to Kosminski (one shudders at the level of contamination *any* item would have accumulated from 1888 to 2007). However, a published paper in 2019 was retracted on the grounds that the original mitochondrial DNA raw data was "no longer available." Using mtDNA is problematic in its own right, as it provides a much smaller strand of identification, and consequently carries far less weight on research grounds than nuclear or cellular DNA. At least Edwards provides another footnote to the myth, which becomes more delusional as the decades grind on.

~Shadow of The Avenger~

THE LODGER: A STORY OF THE LONDON FOG (1927)

German poster art depicting Ivor Novello handcuffed to railings during the climax of Alfred Hitchcock's silent thriller. The director would admit ruefully that it was an overly indulgent Christ metaphor.

AFTER WWI, the British film industry was dilapidated in manpower and by Government restrictions which had prioritised the war effort, reaching a nadir in late 1924 when production ceased throughout all studios. A humiliated Germany, however, produced a list of influential, doom-laden pieces of Expressionistic art, such as **THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI** and **NOSFERATU**. It was a strange time, then, for Michael Balcon and Graham Cutts to form Gainsborough. Entering into a co-production agreement with Erich Pommer of Berlin's Ufa, a young Alfred Hitchcock - of whom Balcon had retained from his takeover of Islington's Famous Players-Lasky - was dispatched to Germany to observe working methods. After making his first two features as a fully fledged director, Hitchcock returned home for the first true *Hitchcockian* enterprise, **THE LODGER: A STORY OF THE LONDON FOG**.

Based on the 1913 novel by Marie Belloc Lowndes, **THE LODGER** concerns a Jack the Ripper type murderer. The Avenger is stalking London killing blonde women on Tuesday evenings, leaving a card with his name written within a triangle. A secretive young man (Ivor Novello), bearing a resemblance to the description of The Avenger, arrives at the Bunting lodgings. Mrs Bunting (Marie Ault) and her husband (Arthur Chesney) have a fashion model daughter Daisy (June Tripp), who shows lukewarm interest in the affections of Scotland Yard detective Joe (Malcolm Keen). As Daisy falls for the stranger, and Joe is assigned to the case, the police search the lodger's room. They find a bag containing a gun, a map of the murders, newspaper clippings and a photograph of a blonde woman, whom Joe recognises as an Avenger victim. The lodger explains that the woman pictured was his sister, and that he had vowed to his dying mother that he would bring the killer to justice.

"If you have the right eye for these things, you can see that accused men are often attractive"

- Franz Kafka

Commentators often cite Hitchcock's framing of Ivor Novello's entrance as a conscious homage *to F. W. Murnau's* ***NOSFERATU****. But the image is directly lifted from Marie Belloc Lowndes' source material: "a tall, thin shadow of a man" with a "dark, hatchet-shaped face" stands in the lodging house doorway.*

THE LODGER kick-started many of Hitchcock's recurring motifs, particularly that of an obsession with blondes and innocent men on the run. Heavily influenced by his time on German sets, one memorable scene occurs when the Buntings' kitchen ceiling becomes transparent, showing the lodger pacing above (a thick sheet of toughened glass was used). Additionally, the shot looking directly down a stairwell is one of many climbing/descending sequences in Hitchcock's *oeuvre*. **THE LODGER** also started a more recognisable tradition with the Hitchcock cameo, here appearing twice: in a newsroom, and as part of the finale's crowd. The German Expressionist influence was not just technical to the filmmaker; Teutonic films of the 1920s often told of mindscapes where innocent people are thrown into raw, emotional situations. Such a foundation could be applied to the director's filmography as a whole.

Hitchcock’s portrayal of blonde females inevitably changed over his decades of output. June Tripp's Daisy is hardly the icy female of later works, rather a playful, likeable, down to earth character. Both her most memorable scenes are not from the novel but undeniably *Hitchcockian*: Daisy and Joe in handcuffs hints at fetishism, and - predating **PSYCHO**'s shower scene by over thirty years - Daisy relaxes in a soapy bath. The steam rising outside the window is noticed by the lodger, who creeps downstairs only to find the door locked. With Daisy setting the mould for the Hitchcock woman, Ivor Novello similarly created a template for the men: most were lanky specimens with dark eyes and raven hair. This is a convention of stage and screen to be sure, and all directors imagine themselves as their leading men. But in the context of Hitchcock, it can be seen as a wistful projection from his renowned short and large frame.

~"It's a nasty night innit?"~

JACK THE RIPPER (1959)

Unlike the documented slayings, this controversial Tempean production features strangulation followed with knifings that are almost an afterthought.

DIRECTED by producers Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman (who also helmed **THE HELLFIRE CLUB**), **JACK THE RIPPER** belongs to a quartet of British chillers - **HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM**, **PEEPING TOM**, **CIRCUS OF HORRORS** - that pushed the bar on sadism. Both the Mercy Hospital for Women, and the Whitechapel police, are laden with the archetypal angry mob as a black-clad figure with a surgical bag is haunting the East End, asking his victims "Are you Mary Clark?" Inspector O'Neill (Eddie Byrne) welcomes a visit from his friend, NYPD detective Sam Lowry (Lee Patterson), who becomes attracted to Anne Ford (Betty McDowall). While the leading red herrings are Ford's guardian Dr Tranter (John Le Mesurier) and hunchbacked orderly Louis (Endre Muller), this Saucy Jack turns out to be Sir David Rogers (Ewan Solon), who finally kills Clark (Barbara Burke) as revenge for the suicide of his son, who found out his lover was a prostitute.

"Tall he was - and his face all wrapped up"
- Female Eyewitness,
THE LODGER: A STORY OF THE LONDON FOG

Loosely based on Leonard Matters' book *The Mystery of Jack the Ripper* and scripted by Jimmy Sangster, **JACK THE RIPPER** was given an aggressive promotional campaign in the States - which even included a Steve Allen novelty single - and the American version disposes of Stanley Black's score and also has a colour insert of oozing blood for Rogers' lift squashing. A spiced-up continental version adds four minutes to the running time, and was particularly popular in France. Here the murders had extended knife thrusts and exposed breasts, with the nudity quota increased by a showgirl changing room. But the most salacious difference was a private sequence where champagne is poured over Maggie (Dorinda Stevens)'s chest.

Matters and his source publication are an interesting topic in itself. An Adelaide-born journalist who fought in the Second Boer War and became a Labour politician, Matters proposed in a 1926 article that Jack was a doctor whose son had died from syphilis caught from Mary Kelly; dubbed "Dr Stanley," he committed the murders in revenge and then fled to Argentina (where the author had been editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*). *The Mystery of Jack the Ripper* was an expansion of this, an alleged deathbed confession which stumbles at the first step because Kelly's autopsy found no evidence of sexual disease. Nevertheless, this 1929 book was marketed as the first serious study of the murders, and is a must-have on the shelf of any Ripperologist, largely because it contains photographs of the crime locations before they were demolished.

Baker and Berman's black-and-white Ripperland looks suitably drab but ludicrously deserted (Berman was actually born in Whitechapel).

Taking a cue from **THE LODGER**, the killer is indeed an avenger. But the production seems like a missed opportunity, especially following Sangster's exploits with Hammer, which basically had just started the Anglo horror boom with **CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN** and **DRACULA**. The turgid police investigation is one of many traditional motifs, alongside gurning extras, a very British form of sexual repression, and a then commonplace casting of an American leading man for an English picture. In fact, **JACK THE RIPPER** is very much in the manner of the Matters book, a basic primer for a terrorised Victorian world too readily accepting outlandish explanations at face value. As cinema entered the 1960s, Hitchcock's **PSYCHO** picked up the knife-wielding assailant with a much needed relish.

~Carry On Ripping~

A STUDY IN TERROR (1966)

Edina Ronay's Mary Kelly in peril. The Anglo-Hungarian daughter of food critic Egon and mother of actress/writer Shebah, Edina was noteworthy in other British pictures ***THE BLACK TORMENT*** *and* ***PREHISTORIC WOMEN****. By the mid 1970's she had retired from the screen to take up fashion design, specialising in knitwear.*

WHEN Compton exploitation producers Michael Klinger and Tony Tenser - together with Henry E. Lester, executor of the Arthur Conan Doyle estate and head of Sir Nigel Films - touched on the idea of divorcing Sherlock Holmes from his usual canon of literature to forge a fresh new career in features, James Hill's **A STUDY IN TERROR** sees a youthful and athletic Holmes (John Neville) investigate the Whitechapel murders. However, the desire to downplay the Ripper aspects and re-establish Holmes and Watson as series characters never took off in a decade of James Bond's and Derek Flint's. Drawn into the investigation when he receives a case of surgical instruments through the post - minus a scalpel - Holmes is led to the estate of the Osbourne family and the medical mission of Dr Murray (Anthony Quayle). Unravelling the mystery, Holmes and Watson (Donald Houston) are drawn into a tangled web which involves a family feud, blackmail and revenge set against the ongoing slaughter of the East End.

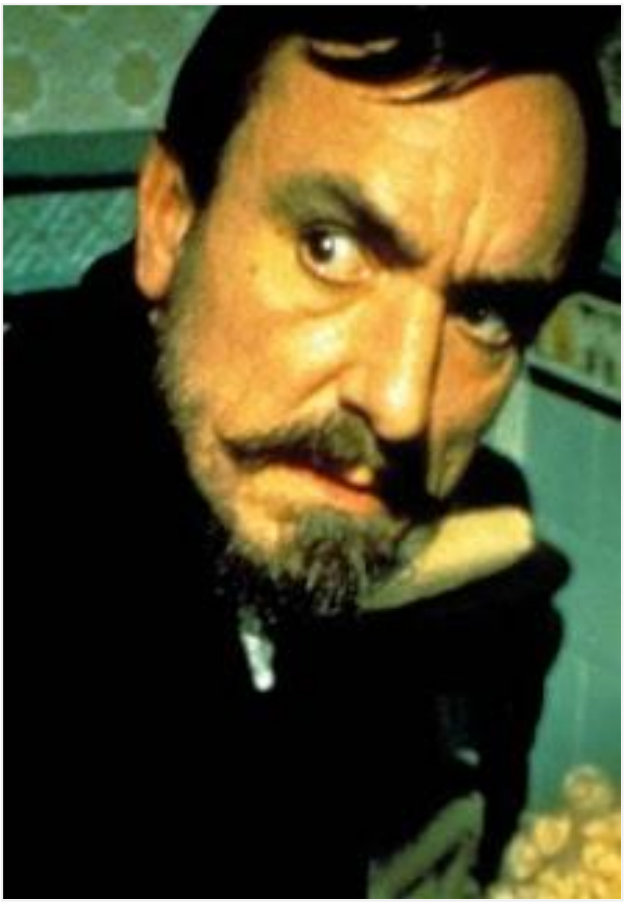
"Cut deeply, John. That's the secret of surgery these days: cut deeply" - Dr Tranter (John Le Mesurier), **JACK THE RIPPER** (1959)

Despite authentic production design and costume, the Whitechapel of **A STUDY IN TERROR** is that of filmic melodrama and prostitutes straight from the 1960s (using the actual names of the victims for the first time on screen). The promise of the film pitting Conan Doyle's master detective against Saucy Jack is never realised by a script which sees its prime duty as providing a fictional solution to the crimes. In a screen career which stretched back to the turn of the century, the casting of the detective was less important here, with Holmes merely a gimmick. The action sequences - where Holmes is equipped with pistol and sword stick - led to Columbia's American ads selling the film under the wing of the then topical BATMAN TV show. Complete with "Pow!," "Biff!" and "Crunch!," Sherlock Holmes was apparently "...the original Caped Crusader."

A STUDY IN TERROR foreshadows Bob Clark's 1979 **MURDER BY DECREE** on the call sheet as well as the synopsis. Frank Finlay plays Inspector Lestrade in both, here particularly dim-witted ("A bayonet? Soldiers carry bayonets!"), and Quayle would go on to play Sir Charles Warren in the later release. Although Neville makes a fine Holmes, Houston's Watson is less well served by a return to the pompous and bumbling persona perfected by Nigel Bruce in the films of the 1940s.

~Daughter of Darkness~

HANDS OF THE RIPPER (1971)

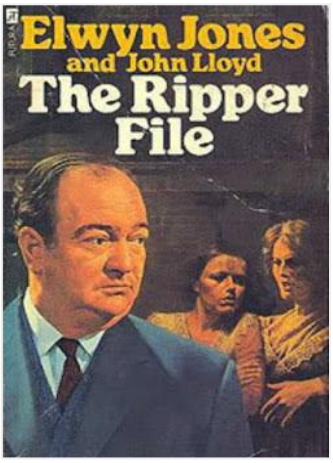


*Eric Porter plays John Pritchard. Porter had previously survived Hammer's **THE LOST CONTINENT**, but was primarily known for his portrayal of tortured solicitor Soames in the BBC's THE FORSYTE SAGA, which won him a BAFTA Best Actor award.*

THIS Hammer film was arguably the studio's finest release of the 1970s, and their first flirtation with Jack since the Exclusive-bannered **ROOM TO LET** in 1950. Directed by Peter Sasdy, **HANDS OF THE RIPPER** has a quality of production which contradicts the truth of a company in decline: a lush score, impressive stock sets, and use of real locations and extras provide a fitting stage for a uniformly excellent cast, and even the blood looks real. In a memorable pre-credits sequence set in Berner Street, Whitechapel, a young girl watches as her father is revealed to be a syphilis-scarred man leading a double life as Jack. Anna (Angharad Rees) grows to young womanhood as an orphan, working for a charlatan psychic, Mrs Golding (Dora Bryan). After committing the impaling murder of Golding of which she is not suspected, brusque Dr Pritchard (Eric Porter) - an early practitioner of Freudian psychology - takes Anna home as his ward.

"Night and day are indistinguishable in these rooms. A lamp turned down is my morning sun, Mr Holmes"
- Angela Osbourne (Adrienne Corri), **A STUDY IN TERROR**

Rees is the antithesis of the usual cleavage-heavy Hammer female lead, her doll-like visage effectively illustrating the innocence behind her curse as the "possessed" spirit of a serial killer. Its an interesting twist on Ripper lore which can be traced back to the "Mad Midwife/Jill the Ripper" theory, which surmised that there was a female covering up a series of botched abortions, a notion quashed by the fact that none of the victims were pregnant. Anna is so fragile the viewer is rendered helplessly sympathetic towards her, despite her acts of grandiose murder (none of which are committed by knife) whenever she becomes entranced by sparkling light: housemaid Dolly (Marjie Lawrence) has her throat slashed by a vanity mirror and left in a bath of blood; Prichard's torso is perforated by a sabre; and in the film's standout gore moment, prostitute Long Liz Stride (Lynda Baron) has her face pierced by hatpins.



~Ripper At Large~

JACK THE RIPPER (1973)
MURDER BY DECREE (1979)
JACK THE RIPPER (1988)

The Ripper File*, published in 1975, was a companion to the 1973 BBC docu-series.*

DR Thomas Stowell's article in the November 1970 *Criminologist* instigated a resurgence of interest in the Whitechapel murders. Implicating the grandson of Queen Victoria, it set in motion a snowballing of imperfections welcomed by Stephen Knight's 1976 bestseller *Jack The Ripper: The Final Solution*. Stowell drew comparisons between the evisceration of the women and the disembowelment of deer shot by the aristocracy on their estates, and surmises that - although not named directly - Prince Albert Victor went mad after contracting syphilis in the West Indies. Three years later, JACK THE RIPPER was a six-part BBC "documentary investigation" into the killings, which mixed period re-enactments with contemporary sleuthing from fictional Detective Chief Superintendents Barlow (Stratford Johns) and Watt (Frank Windsor), characters popular on Z-CARS and its sequels SOFTYLY, SOFTLY and BARLOW AT LARGE.

"What are dreams? And what is real, Anna? I've never known. What does it matter?"
- Jack the Ripper (Danny Lyons), **HANDS OF THE RIPPER**

This cross-pollination discusses suspects, forensics and conspiracies in stuffy *ad infinitum*, and after five hours concludes there is insufficient evidence to determine who Jack was. Written by Elwyn Jones and John Lloyd, the programme builds a foundation for masonic influence - after all, Watt has read prominent mason Commissioner Warren's autobiography - with analysis of the wall message "The Juwes are The men That Will not be Blamed for nothing." With no substantiation to the Ripper crimes, let alone Freemasonry, this fixation with the scrawl on Goulston Street is one of many blind alleys the broadcast creates for itself. And just when you think no more information could be squeezed in, the show's surprise witness is held back to the final moments: Joseph 'Hobo' Sickert, illegitimate son of Walter Sickert. Self-scripted and shot on Super-8, Joseph recalls his strange genealogy and conveys Royal Physician Sir William Gull (as did Stowell) and driver John Netley as the killers.

After this broadcasting bombshell, the *East London Advertiser* sent Knight to interview Joseph. Fleshed out into his "Final Solution," Knight details an elaborate theory involving the British royal family, freemasonry and Sickert. He concluded that the victims were murdered to cover up a secret marriage between the second-in-line to the throne, Prince Albert Victor, and working class Catholic Annie Elizabeth Crook. Crook and the couple's daughter are consequently spirited away, and a quintet of Whitechapel tarts - privy to the circumstances through the employment of one of their number (Mary Kelly) as the child's Nanny - were disposed of by a team of assassins. However, when Knight's misinformation builds to implicating his father more than to Joseph's liking, 'Hobo' withdrew his co-operation and put on record that he had made everything up.

A former London Electricity Board salesman turned newspaper reporter, Knight's *Final Solution* was unleashed onto a public eager to devour any government inspired cover-ups. Its suffocating angles on Freemasonry and Royal Family shenanigans was highly controversial, and soon Knight himself was placed beyond inquisitorial reach: he died of a brain haemorrhage in 1985 at the age of 33. Against this backdrop, screenwriter John Hopkins - a veteran of Z-CARS and co-author of the fourth James Bond picture **THUNDERBALL** - wrote **MURDER BY DECREE**, a UK/Canadian co-production "based on *The Ripper File* by Elwyn Jones and John Lloyd" and is "a fictional dramatisation based on recent theories concerning the infamous crimes."

***MURDER BY DECREE** marks a curious turning point for its director Bob Clark. Previously Clark was known in horror circles, making Vietnam-era classic **DEATHDREAM** and proto-slasher **BLACK CHRISTMAS**. After, he divulged in the likes of teen landmark **PORKY'S** and holiday classic **A CHRISTMAS STORY**.*

What **MURDER BY DECREE** also manages to portray is a 124-minute snoozefest, not helped by a final portion recapping what we already know, and end credits which replay scenes to illustrate its *dramatis personae*. When Scotland Yard is unable to stop brutal slayings on the East End streets, a citizens committee approaches Sherlock Holmes (Christopher Plummer, replacing Peter O'Toole) and Dr Watson (a scene-stealing James Mason) to investigate. Following a trail which includes suspicious Inspector Foxborough (David Hemming), psychic medium Robert Lees (Donald Sutherland) and institutionalised Annie Crook (Genevieve Bujold), Holmes' discovers the shocking truth amongst the highest ranks of the land, leading to a verbal sparring with Prime Minister Lord Salisbury (John Gielgud).

Plummer takes the character closer to mental anguish than expected, even crying when contemplating the blight of Crook. Elsewhere his Sherlock is all over the place, too good-humoured for the most part, before untypically attempting to strangle an asylum governor. And swimming against the tide of all portrayals before him, he is also a socialist; when Salisbury lectures on the perceived threat to the government, Holmes replies "I care nothing about that; you're all the same to me."

Holmes and Jack never interact in Arthur Conan Doyle canon, despite the fact that the murders were hugely discussed in London news and society around the same time the first stories were published. For whatever reason, Conan Doyle chose not to tackle this infamous real-world case in Holmes' environment. Many writers since then have brought the two together in a variety of media, even in video games (*Sherlock Holmes Versus Jack the Ripper* was released for Microsoft Windows and the XBox 360 in 2009). One of the most successful additions was *Anno Dracula* by Kim Newman in 1992. Here, in an alternate London ruled by Dracula, Holmes has been dispatched to a prison camp, and it is up to Inspector Lestrade to solve the Ripper murders, and Mycroft and The Diogenes Club to destroy the other Prince of Darkness.

After the breezy **A STUDY IN TERROR**, **MURDER BY DECREE** takes a more sombre tone in its melding of Homes and The Ripper, getting plenty of mileage from the stereotypically fog bound streets and wharfs of Victorian London built at Shepperton Studios. Despite this atmosphere it is low on chills, but there is one unnerving scene. As we follow Holmes to Mary Kelly (Susan Clark)'s hovel, we see joint killers Sir Thomas Spivey (Roy Lansford) - the film's equivalent of Sir William Gull - and sidekick William Slade (Peter Jonfield) gloatingly prevail over the woman's bloodied corpse.

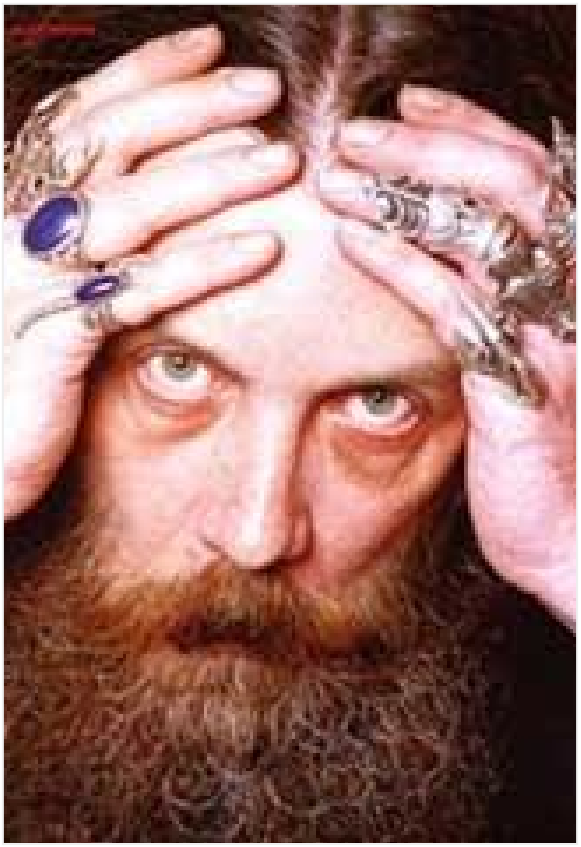
"You told me to bring you Jack the Ripper. You sign that piece of paper and I will ... tonight!" Michael Caine - as Inspector Frederick Abberline - is the casting coup of ITV's JACK THE RIPPER.

Made to coincide with the Ripper centennial, the ITV JACK THE RIPPER is an out-of-control drama but ratings winner, casting Michael Caine as Inspector Abberline and Lewis Collins as Sergeant George Godley. Director and co-writer David Wickes - who had helmed two episodes of the BBC JACK THE RIPPER - stated that he had been allowed unprecedented access to Scotland Yard files, and that his production would be revealing the true identity of Jack for the first time. However, after pressure from numerous Ripperologists Wickes withdraw this claim, but the series still begins with a disclaimer on behalf of the production staff: "our story is based on extensive research, including a review of the official files by special permission of the Home Office and interviews with leading criminologists and Scotland Yard officials." Wickes' announcement that he had filmed several alternative endings lends no credence to the unfolding structure, and was more likely another publicity stunt.

Comprising of two ninety-minute episodes broadcast on consecutive evenings in October 1988, the series' revelation that Sir William Gull (Ray McAnally) was the killer is laughably old hat, after threads lead the viewer to Richard Mansfield (Armand Assante), socialist George Lusk (Michael Gothard) and Queen Victoria's clairvoyant Robert Lees (Ken Bones). The melodramatic story also takes great liberties in characterisation: Abberline's alcoholism is present solely for dramatic licence, and Lusk's depiction as an anarchic troublemaker hides the fact that he was actually a nondescript businessman and church warden. Although the crime scenes are the most authentic part - particularly Mary Kelly's Miller's Court slaying - the rest exists in its own self-important, distorted world, which advances nothing beyond Knight. When Gull eventually breaks ("they're only worthless whores!,") the surgeon's jolting transformation from kind family man to barking mad is as abrupt as Abberline's bawling.

~Moore's Murderer~

From Hell (1988-98)
The From Hell Companion (2013)
FROM HELL (2001)



Alan Moore has shaped and refined the art of comic book storytelling in a way that no other creator can claim, and may arguably be the medium's only true genius.

NORTHAMPTON scribe Alan Moore was the first modern writer to approach the comic book medium with the same intent and thoughtfulness expected of any successful novel or theatrical production. In an art form that is often dismissed as juvenile, Moore explores adult themes and challenging subjects, but also experiments with form, creating different ways to combine text and image. By adding his own highly tuned sense of playfulness, Moore creates a nexus where readers can embrace some of the deepest aspirations of humankind while exploring the heritage of the comic book universe. *From Hell*, a post-modern *grimoire* of Jack the Ripper written by Moore and studiously illustrated by Eddie Campbell, is an exhaustively researched magnum opus, both a baroque conspiracy story and an intricate dissection of the Victorian era. As the Ripper cuts and slashes the "warm corpse of history itself," Moore examines the burgeoning black library of Ripper lore for the facts, then rearranges them in a yarn that transcends the source material.

"What we need now, George, is the best man in the country on madness!"
- Inspector Abberline (Michael Caine), JACK THE RIPPER (1988)

Starting work on the project exactly a century after the killings it portrays, Moore plays with the idea that the 1880s were a sort of microcosm of what was going to happen in the 20th century - scientifically, artistically, and politically. The point is not to solve the murders; instead, he is interested in how the crimes have become part of a cultural psyche. Jack the Ripper, in a very real sense, never had a physical existence; he was a collage-creature, made from crank letters, hoaxes, and sensational headlines. Right from their inception, the murders entered the realm of fiction, and the reality of the case has rarely been anything but a sideshow. *From Hell* presents Sir William Gull as a magician, and that the murders will be acts of social magic, surmising that history itself has a structure, with Freemasonry its architect.

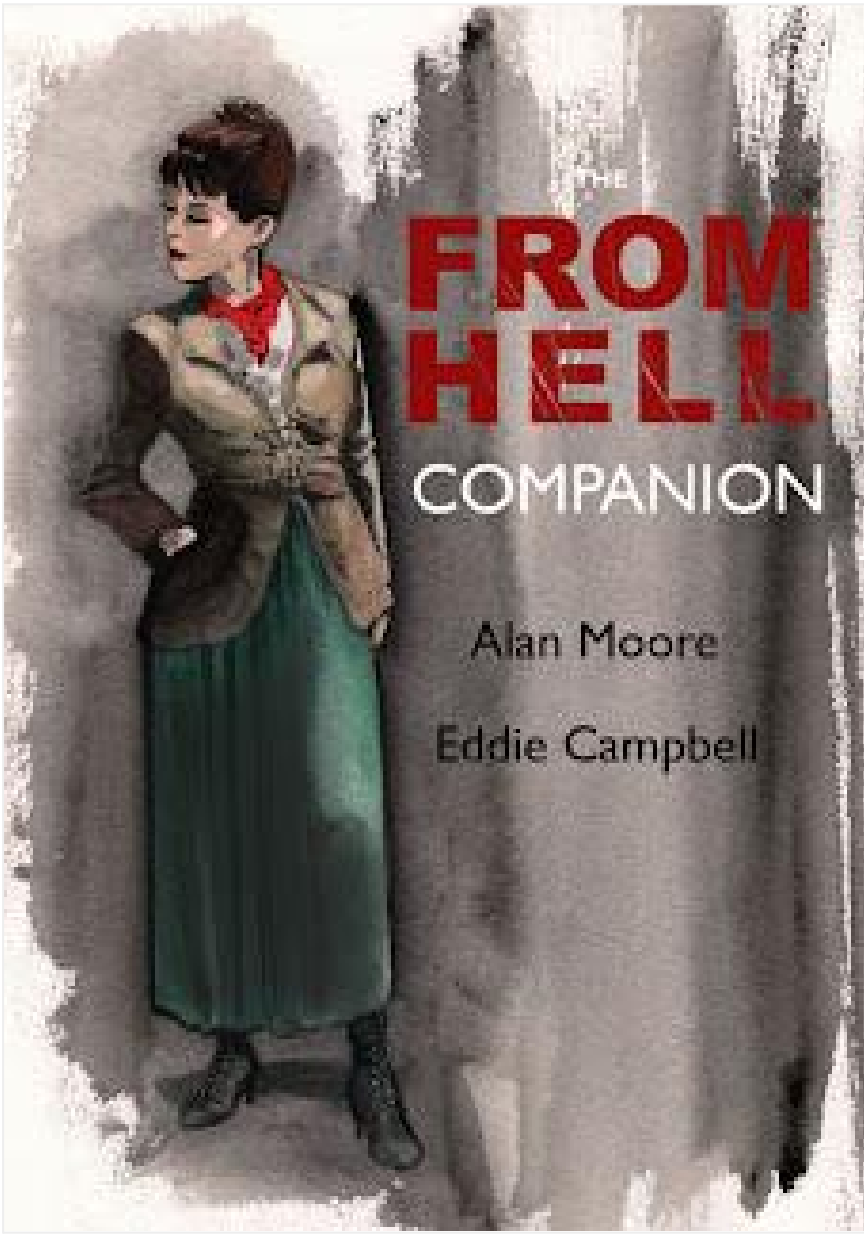
One of the greatest attributes of Moore's work is his deep knowledge of collaboration; his famously detailed scripts depict the writer as *auteur*, but deliberately play to individual artist's strengths. Through a cinematic sense of place, Campbell's angry black-and-white renderings effectively convey the Victorians swimming against the tide, brutally bringing to life such realities as street prostitution - the cold, cheap rooms, the alcohol, and biscuits paid for a three pence a fuck (the infamous "thrup'ny upright"). Consequently, Campbell illustrates a London that to a large extent no longer exists, yet is arguably the book's primary character. As drab as late 19th century London may have been, Moore and Campbell uncover the concealed energy lying below the surface, and *From Hell* burns with a secret and tragic knowledge.

Moore's Gull is following his one true task, no matter how unsympathetic or barbaric. Longing for the Masonic God Jubelah, desire to serve shrouds the ability to function on both a mental and physical level.

From Hell's fourth chapter holds a special significance for the writer, as a line of dialogue - "the one place in which Gods and demons inarguably exist is in the human mind where they are real in all their grandeur and monstrosity" - sparked his interest in becoming a magician, fueled by drugs and imaginative concentration. Moore has never been a fan of tags, stating in a *Mustard* #4 Vol II (March 2009) interview "my experience of life is that it is not divided up into genres; it's a horrifying, romantic, tragic, comical, science fiction cowboy detective novel ... with a bit of pornography if you're lucky." Subsequently, *From Hell* is more than a graphic novel of the Whitechapel murders, rather a meditation on the mechanics of five socially-charged murders that expertly adhere to Moore's quest that his work acts "like a drug ... if you put the words in the right order with the pictures, you can create a psychedelic state."

The From Hell Companion is a Knockabout softcover which contains a selection of Moore's original scripts and sketches, with annotations and commentary from Campbell. The artist provides a fascinating series of narrative-order anecdotes and confessions that only he can, having shared an exhausting decade-long journey that survived three publishing bankruptcies and spawned a vacuous film adaptation. Moore's voluminous, capital-bashing scripts are overpowering - for example, in a chapter three market scene, a single 3" x 2" panel could never start to depict an envisioned sexual relationship between two street urchins - and Campbell includes a word count for each of the entries like a badge of honour. It is therefore refreshing that even though the reader is awash in the dankness of Victorian London, Campbell - despite an over reliance on Wikipedia - speaks comfortably and clearly about the problems with confronting such an onslaught and its transition to the comic page.

In the foreword, Craig Fischer and Charles Hatfield highlight the need for a companion book, to explain a project that is densely threefold: firstly, the connections between freemasonry, occultism and architecture; secondly, how these subjects are woven into a story; and thirdly, how a personal friendship and artistic collaboration survives under such prolonged duress. Moore has always been more vocal and robust than his esteemed artist, but Campbell is equally fascinating as both an individual and illustrator; the Australia-located Scot surmises that the human condition cannot accept a random universe, inventing its Gods and conspiracies to explain at least some order. Perhaps it is better to believe that evil is in control, rather than there being no control.



"Our story's written, Netley, inked in blood long dry ... engraved in stone." A new Eddie Campbell watercolour graces the cover of The From Hell Companion*; in Campbell's epilogue, one closes the book sharing the illustrator's sentiment "all the people that I worried I could never quite bring to life now sadden me with their last glimpse."*

Moore has never championed the silver screen, insisting that the medium is inherently technical thus financial, creating a tendency to drive and immerse the viewer on a set path thus limiting personal interaction and development. Books and comics therefore are the arts of choice, where the reader isn't spoon-fed.

Adapting the events but not the narrative focus of Moore and Campbell's work, the film version of **FROM HELL** is imbued with violence, but it is not the violence of the book, rather the macho posturing and strong-arm tactics of Hollywood. Essentially a remake of **MURDER BY DECREE**, it is scripted in the formulaic manner of a serial-killer thriller, director brothers Albert and Allen Hughes give the impression that an American audience might gain if a British production tried to recreate Metropolis. Apart from the scene where Inspector Abberline (Johnny Depp) and Mary Kelly (Heather Graham) saunter through Hampton Court Gardens, **FROM HELL** offers no relief from the squalor and dark-age superstition which it sees as epitomising the period. None of this is helped by having the historically respectable Abberline while away his leisure hours in an opium den, and act as a seer afflicted by precognitive glimpses of the killings.

Johnny Depp and Heather Graham are both woefully miscast in ***FROM HELL****.*

The murders themselves are varied and stylish, ranging from **SE7EN**-style montages to *giallo*-influenced throat slashing, but given the film had two hands at the helm, overall it is conventionally handled. Endless crane shots and a surplus of lap dissolves work against the action; one sequence employs time-lapse photography to show the gathering of a crowd around the body of the first Ripper victim Polly Nichols, but this is a gimmick used in isolation and reminiscent of the glass-ceiling shot in **THE LODGER: A STORY OF THE LONDON FOG**. But it is the weak casting of the two leads that is the primary flaw. A glum Depp struggles to maintain his Scottish/Cockney accent, and Graham radiates a sunny Californian physicality despite her dyed red hair and working girl lilt that would not even pass for a prostitute in modern day Los Angeles, let alone in the mean streets of Victorian London. This problem is amplified by a superior British supporting cast, including Ian Holm as Gull and Jason Flemyng as Netley.

“Theories! We were
almost lost in theories”
- Inspector Abberline,
Cassell’s Saturday Journal